The Latent Masorah of the Samaritans

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It is well known that the Samaritans have a very stable reading-tradition of the Torah[1]. Both textual and linguistic observations led to the conclusion that this oral reading-tradition originates in the late 2nd century BCE.[2] But how did the Samaritan community manage to hand down its reading-tradition in the reliable way it obviously did? Why did the reading-tradition not undergo major changes in the course of the long period of more than 2000 years? This enigma is the subject of my following considerations.

Within the Jewish tradition, the pivotal stabilizer of the transmission of the Torah is the framework of the "*Masorah*", which was developed by the "*Masoretes*" since the 7th century CE and aims at the preservation of the text as a whole as well as of its different parts, like external shape, stock of words and verses, punctuation, spelling, vocalization etc.[3] As a matter of fact, the Masoretic activity was not an act of tradition-making, but of tradition-keeping.

Like the Jews, the Samaritans developed a Masoretic activity, too,[4] even if it was never nearly as comprehensive as the Jewish Masorah, most probably due to the fact that the Samaritan transmission of the Torah seems to have been centered always on the oral and not the written tradition, as Ben-Hayyim describes:

"The Samaritan text [sc. of the Torah] is different from the Jewish text regarding the way of its transmission. In general, the Jewish text is scrutinized and handed down with great accurateness in all its signs, and every

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1   Parts of the present paper are an English version of the chapter „Die latente Masora der samaritanischen Lesetradition", cf. SCHORCH, Vokale, 61-75.

2   BEN-HAYYIM, Grammar, 335; SCHORCH, Vokale, 39-61; SCHORCH, Origin, 13-15; SCHORCH, Formation, 10-17.

3   See YEIVIN, מסורה; YEIVIN, Introduction, 34; TOV, Text, 16-64.

4   See e.g. GASTER, Massoretisches; KAHLE, Lesezeichen; CROWN, Habits; CROWN, Writing.

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single case of plene- or defective spelling is counted. The Samaritan text is different: The hundreds of manuscripts which we know of display many variations in spelling, since the Samaritan transmission is not so much focused on the biblical saying [Deut 31,19] 'כתבו לכם' ['*write for yourselves*'], but on 'ולמדו את בני ישראל שימה בפיהם' ['*teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips*']. Therefore, although there are differences in spelling in the manuscripts […], the reading is always the same."[5]

This concept of essential orality leads us back to our initial question, how this oral tradition was upheld in the stable way it obviously was.

I would like to suggest that this question finds its answer in a phenomenon which was detected and described by Shlomo Morag. Morag successfully proofed the existence of Masorah-like frameworks within the oral tradition of post-Biblical texts (especially the reading of the Mishna) among various Jewish communities. In contrast to the *Masorah* of the Biblical tradition, this *Masorah* had not been laid down in script, but became an intrinsic element of the oral tradition itself:

> "…a feature which, although never formulated in writing, discloses a net of functions which bear resemblance to the Biblical Masorah. The resemblance lies mainly in that the aforementioned feature is highly significant in maintaining and passing over from generation to another the traditionally correct reading of post-biblical Hebrew texts."[6]

The phenomenon was labeled "latent Masorah" by Morag, who described the following features as its main characteristics:
The respective oral tradition contains linguistic forms which differ from what should be expected but are nevertheless completely explainable within the framework of historical linguistics.[7]
The respective oral tradition attests in many instances a phenomenon, which seems to be close to the Masoretic distinction of *Kətīb* and *Qərē*.[8]
Focusing our interest now on the Samaritan reading-tradition of the Torah, it appears that this tradition displays not only the two features listed by Morag (see below, 1.-2.), but several additional Masoretic features, which are not included in his list (3.-5.), i.e.:
1) The existence of parallel forms going back to different historical points of departure.
2) The partial independence of *Kətīb* and *Qərē*.

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5   BEN-HAYYIM in his preface to the synoptic edition of the Samaritan and Masoretic version of the Torah by Abraham and Ratzon TSEDAKA. The original is in Hebrew.

6   MORAG, Masorah, 333.

7   MORAG, Masorah, 334-342.

8   MORAG, Masorah, 342.

3) The marking of nomina sacra.

4) Concurring traditions in the field of punctuation.

5) Concurring traditions with regard to the vocalization of a certain reading.

On account of these features, the riddle of the very conservative nature of the Samaritan reading-tradition seems to be solved: In fact, the Samaritan reading-tradition of the Torah was preserved due to the existence of a "latent Masorah".

In the following, I will explain each of the five points listed above.

1. The existence of parallel forms going back to different historical forms of departure

The number of parallel forms comprised in the Samaritan reading-tradition of the Torah is high. As a rule, the existence of these parallel forms is not explainable in terms of synchron linguistics, but they reflect different historical basic forms. An example is the imperfect of verba primae laryngalis, which is attested with and without doubling of the second radical, resulting in the parallel existence of the pattern *yāzab* versus *yāzzab* (= יעזב):

–   יעזבך *yāzābak* [Deut 31,6.8]   vs.   יעזב *yāzzab* [Gen 2,24]

–   תחבט *tābbaṭ* [Deut 24,20]   vs.   תחבל *tāba* [Exod 22,25;
                                                              Deut 24,17]

As Ben-Hayyim has shown, the form with simple consonant goes back to a basic form with secondary vowel between the first and the second radical (**ya^{ca}zab*), while the form with double consonant goes back to the basic form without secondary vowel (**ya^czab*) resulting in the assimilation of the first to the second radical.[9]

2. The partial independence of *Kətīb* and *Qərē*

The second feature of a latent Masorah, the partial independence of *Kətīb* and *Qərē*, is well illustrated by the fact that Samaritan scribes can switch freely between *scriptio plena* and *scriptio defectiva*, rather led by their oral reading-tradition than by the manuscript they actually copy.[10]

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9   BEN-HAYYIM, Grammar, 122 § 2.2.1.1.7.

10   See above at note 5.

Moreover, the Tetragrammaton יהוה is regularly read *šēma*, attesting again the independence of the oral reading-tradition versus the written tradition.[11] A further example is the word וְנִקִּיתָ in Gen 24,8: While all the Samaritan manuscripts known to me contain the reading ונקית, the reading followed by most of the Samaritans is *nēqutta*.[12]

3. The marking of nomina sacra

As is well known from the Qumran founds, the graphical marking of *nomin*a *sacra* by means of a different script or additional signs was a widespread phenomenon in Jewish antiquity.[13] In the Jewish Masoretical tradition, this habit has been continued in several ways: Some Tiberian manuscripts have a notice in their *Masorah parva* indicating whether the noun אלהים at a certain place has the meaning "god" or "idol", which means, whether it is a *nomen sacrum* or not. According to the Babylonian Masorah, every single אלהים gets a *Rafe* when it should be understood as *nomen sacrum*, but a *Dagesh* if not.[14]

A similar attempt to make a clear distinction between the common use of a certain word and its use as a nomen sacrum is familiar to the Samaritan reading-tradition as well.[15] As is well known, the word אדני is pronounced *ādāni* when referring to the god of Israel (see below, example 1), but *ādanni*, when referring to men (2) or when used by non-Israelites (3):

1) (Jhwh adressed by an Israelite):
   ויאמר משה אל יהוה בי אדני – "Then Moses said to the Lord: O my Lord [*ādāni*]…" (Exod 4,10)
2) (Man adressed:)
   שמענו אדני– "Hear us, my Lord [*ādanni*]!" (Gen 23,6)
3) (Jhwh adressed by Non-Israelite:)
   ויאמר אדני– "And he said: my Lord [*ādanni*]!" (Gen 20,4)
   Similarly, the reading of the word אנשים makes a distinction between "men" (*ēnāšəm*) and "heavenly messengers" (*ēnūšəm*):

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11   See BEN-HAYYIM, Samaritans, and TSEDAKA, Israelites.
12   However, there is evidence of a parallel tradition reading *nēqitta*, see SCHORCH, Vokale, 68.
13   See SKEHAN, Name.
14   See YEIVIN, Introduction, 48-49 § 87.
15   See SCHORCH, Korrekturen, 18, and compare FLORENTIN, Studies.

1) (אנשים as "men"):

ויצו עליו פרעה אנשים– "So Pharao commanded his men (ēnāšəm) concerning him." (Gen 12,20)

2) (אנשים as "heavenly messenger"):

והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו – "And behold, three heavenly messengers (ēnūšəm) were standing by him." (Gen 18,2)

In accordance with the tendencies of the Jewish Masorah described above, this distinction should be regarded as a phenomenon belonging to the realm of Masoretical activity. The fact, illustrated by the examples mentioned above, that it is found in the Samaritan reading-tradition is therefore a further indication for the existence of a latent Masorah.

4. Concurring traditions in the field of punctuation

One field of Masoretic activity was the subdivision of the Biblical text into verses by means of punctuation and *accents* (especially *Sillūq* and *Sōp̄ pāsūq*).[16] Similarly, most of the Samaritan manuscripts use a double dot to mark the end of a verse.[17] Sometimes subdivisions are marked by further accents,[18] but they are in any case part of the oral reading-tradition.

It is noteworthy, however, that the reading does not in every place corresponds to the manuscript tradition. An important example may be found in Exod 19,24:[19]

(23 Moses said to the Lord, "The people are not permitted to come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself warned us, saying, 'Set limits around the mountain and keep it holy.'")

24 And the Lord said to him:	24 ויאמר אליו יהוה
Go down and come up,	לך רד והעלית
you and Aaron with you (,)	אתה ואהרון עמך
and the priests (:) and the people –	והכהנים (:) והעם
they shall not break through,	אל יהרסו

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16   See YEIVIN, Introduction, 176-177 § 207.

17   See VON GALL, Pentateuch, LXII-LXIII.

18   A Samaritan-arabic treatise on these reading signs from the 10th century CE has been published and translated into Hebrew by BEN-HAYYIM (כללי אבן דרתה בדבר סדרי "מקרתה") in his LOT II, 338-373, and compare VON GALL, Pentateuch, LXIII.

19   Samaritan Hebrew text according to Ms. 6 of the Nablus synagoge, edited by TAL, Pentateuch.

to come up to the Lord,	לעלות אל יהוה
otherwise he will break out against them.	פן יפרץ בם

In this verse the Samaritan reading-tradition is divided: While the members of the priestly families read a full stop after והכהנים "and the priests", the remaining Samaritan community has the full stop after עמך "with you", beginning a new section with והכהנים "and the priests" (in accordance with the *Atnah* in the Tiberian Masorah).[20] The phenomenon that the tradition is splitted with regard to verse division is well known from the Jewish Masorah, where it is labeled with the terminus *Pisqā beæmṣac pāsūq*.[21] The existence of concurring verse division in the Samaritan reading-tradition of the Torah displays a large similarity to that phenomenon and, being without any written record, should therefore be taken as a further indication for the existence of a latent Masorah.

    With regard to the example cited above yet further observations seem important: The two different kinds of verse division are closely connected with the two different groups reading and handing down the text: The reading transmitted among the priests obviously touches a pivotal point of priestly identity: The priestly forefathers of the desert generation went together with Mose and Aaron for offering on the mountain, while laymen were excluded. The reading handed down among non-priestly families, on the other side, sees both common people *and* priests excluded from going with Mose and Aaron. It claims, therefore, an equal status for both groups with regard to the revelation of the Torah and denies the priests any superiority in that field. It seems obvious that the laymen who hand down this reading see their identity expressed in this way. Since both ways of punctuation correspond to the respective group identities, neither group will leave their tradition but, on the contrary, will even stick to it more firmly. Most paradoxically, therefore, the parallel existence of two variant

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20   The strong impact of the priestly reading-tradition is well demonstrated by the fact that it entered the manuscript tradition. Thus, it is attested in numerous ancient manuscripts: 13 out of the 23 manuscripts recorded in the apparatus *ad loc.* of VON GALL's edition contain the full stop according to the priestly reading, and the same is true for the text of TAL's edition (Ms. 6 of the Nablus synagogue). Among the modern Samaritan editions, that of Israel SEDAKA follows the priestly reading, while the edition of Abraham und Ratzon TSEDAKA contains the following punctuation: ויאמר אליו יהוה, לך רד, ועלית [!] אתה ואהרן עמך, והכהנים והעם אל יהרסו לעלות אל יהוה, פן יפרץ בם.

21   See TOV, Text, 42-43.

readings does not weaken the tradition as a whole, but strengthens it and thus fulfills the general function the Masorah usually is devoted to.

5. Concurring traditions with regard to the vocalization of certain words

This paradox leads to a further point which should be seen within the framework of latent Masorah: The afore mentioned difference with regard to the punctuation of Exod 19,24 is by no means the only reading about which the Samaritan community is divided. Rather, there is a whole stock of words from the Torah which are pronounced in different ways.

Ben-Hayyim provided a short list of 13 differences between his several informants,[22] but this list can easily be expanded to at least 31 cases.[23] Within the Samaritan community, these differences are a subject of discussion and even of quarrel.[24]

Among these 31 differences, the following sub-categories may be discerned: The biggest group, comprising 12 cases, consists of differences in morphology without any semantic implication (e.g. no. 2: *nēqutta* vs. *nēqitta* – Gen 24,8). The second biggest group of 11 cases consists of purely phonological differences (e.g. *ken* vs. *kan*). In one case, the difference is with regard to verbal valence (*alrā'ot it* vs. *alrā'ot at* – Gen 44,26), again not involving a different meaning. On the other hand, a semantical difference is involved in 7 of the 31 cases (e.g. הגברים *āgābārəm* vs. *aggābārəm* – Exod 10,11). It is important to note, however, that these differences are not simply divided between two clear defined parties, but are each time followed by different readers.

In spite of these differences, however, their limited number and content will never endanger the ideal of a uniform reading-tradition. Of course, every single family regards *their* tradition as the most trustworthy, they will insist on it and they will defend it against concurring variants. It is this situation of concurrence and social control which makes people stick more firmly to what has been told them by their father or their teacher. But on the other hand, this constant challenge to every single reader strengthens the tradition as a whole and uniformity remains the common ideal, even if in practice everyone is very well

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22   BEN-HAYYIM, LOT IV, 555-556.
23   See SCHORCH, Vokale, 67-73.
24   See TSEDAKA, Words.

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aware of the differences. Thus, ironically, the transmission of reading differences results in a stronger tradition.

This again has numerous parallels in the Jewish Masorah: As is well known, the Masoretes deliberately collected and transmitted lists of different kind of variants,[25] e.g. the Masoretic lists of *ḥillūpīm* between the Babylonian and the Palestinian tradition (*Mᵉdinḥā'ē vs. Maᶜarbā'ē*[26]) or between the traditions of Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali.[27]

Moreover, there is a close parallel between the parallel tradition of different variants and the Masoretic phenomenon of *sᵉbīrīn*. *Sᵉbīrīn* refer to differences in the Masoretic textus receptus, which are not transmitted because they are to be considered as an acceptable reading, but to the contrary, in order to avoid them:

> "The note *sevirin* does not show that the consonantal text does not indicate the form to be read, or that the text is in any way in doubt. It presents a reading which seems to avoid a difficulty in the text, but the purpose is to warn that this reading is not correct. It is thus given as a support for the received reading."[28]

As in the case of the Samaritan differences discussed above, the Masoretic *sᵉbīrīn* serve the purpose of guarding the tradition through transmitting a second reading. That is why, in my eyes, the parallel transmission of different readings in the Samaritan tradition should be regarded as a Masoretic phenomenon, too.

Coming to a conclusion, we may say, therefore, that the Samaritan oral reading-tradition of the Torah displays several features which do point to the existence of an inherent latent Masorah. It is this Masorah which makes the tradition that stable it obviously is.
The following Masoretic features may be singled out:

− The existence of parallel forms going back to different historical points of departure.
− The partial independence of *Kᵊtīb* and *Qᵊrē*.
− The marking of nomina sacra.
− Concurring traditions in the field of punctuation, corresponding to the Jewish *Pisqā be-æmṣaᶜ pāsūq*.

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25 See YEIVIN, Introduction, 73 § 124.
26 See YEIVIN, Introduction, 139-141 §§ 153-154, and compare TOV, Text, 20.
27 See YEIVIN, Introduction, 141-144 §§ 155-157.
28 YEIVIN, Introduction, 63.

–   Concurring traditions with regard to the vocalisation of certain words corresponding to the Jewish *ḥillūp̄īm*- and *sᵉḇīrīn*-tradition.

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